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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
Fifty-fifth session
2 - 27 August 1999

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION

Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mauritania

1. At its 1340th and 1341st meetings, on 5 and 6 August 1999 (see CERD/C/SR.1340 and 1341), the Committee considered the initial report and the second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports, submitted as a single document (CERD/C/330/Add.1), and, at its 1362nd meeting (see CERD/C/SR.1362), on 20 August 1999, adopted the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the initial report of Mauritania and the opportunity to establish contact with the State party. The Committee is encouraged to note that the State party sent a high-level delegation, led by the Minister of Justice: it has taken note of the additional information supplied by the delegation in the course of a fruitful dialogue. Although the information submitted in the written report was not complete, the Committee expresses its appreciation for the quality of the oral replies supplied by the delegation to the questions raised in the course of discussions.

B. Positive aspects

3. The action and programmes undertaken by the State party to protect the most vulnerable ethnic groups in society are welcomed. In this regard, the Committee notes the establishment of a Commissioner for human rights, poverty alleviation and social integration (1998); the establishment of a Mediator of the Republic; and the measures taken in areas such as housing, health, education, the promotion of women's rights, youth protection, and the struggle against illiteracy and against surviving traditional practices of servitude.

4. It is noted with satisfaction that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and other international human rights instruments, take precedence over national laws in the State party and may be invoked directly before the courts.

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5. The Committee welcomes the ratification by the State party of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

6. The activities undertaken by the State party with a view to implementing article 7 of the Convention, especially the work accomplished through rural radio broadcasts and efforts to combat illiteracy, are also noted.

C. Principal subjects of concern

7. It is noted that the information supplied by the State party concerning the ethnic composition of the population and socio-economic indicators relating to the implementation of the Convention's provisions is incomplete.

8. Insufficient information has been provided about the implementation of articles 2, 4 and 6 of the Convention and about legislation on and judgements, prosecutions and penalties for acts of racial discrimination. The information given is insufficient to verify whether existing legislation is adequate to incriminate the acts referred to in article 4 of the Convention.

9. With regard to article 5 of the Convention, allegations are noted to the effect that some groups of the population, especially the black communities, are still suffering from various forms of exclusion and discrimination, especially where access to public services and employment is concerned. While the Committee notes with satisfaction that Mauritanian legislation has abolished slavery and servitude, it also notes that, in some parts of the country, vestiges of practices of slavery and involuntary servitude could still persist, despite the State party's efforts to eradicate such practices.

D. Suggestions and recommendations

10. For the submission of its next periodic report, the Committee recommends that the State party supply more detailed information concerning the ethnic composition of the population and socio-economic indicators relating to the implementation of the Convention's provisions, as stipulated in paragraphs 8 and 10 of the general guidelines on the preparation of reports.

11. The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary legislative measures to ensure that articles 2, 4 and 6 of the Convention are fully expressed in national law. In this respect, it proposes that the State party, in its next periodic report, supply information concerning legislative measures adopted in compliance with the Convention. It would also like the next periodic report to contain judicial statistical data and, if available, practical examples of court appeals against racial and ethnic discrimination.

12. The Committee recommends that the State party include information in its next report on legislative measures and practices introduced by the authorities to give effect to the provisions of article 5 of the Convention, especially with a view to promoting the struggle against discrimination affecting the most vulnerable groups of the population, in particular the black communities, and to eradicating vestiges of practices of slavery and involuntary servitude.

13. With regard to implementation of article 7 of the Convention, the Committee encourages the State party to pursue its policy in the fields of education, teaching, culture and information. It recommends in particular that it intensify its efforts to promote the various national languages and to encourage the broad dissemination of human rights.

14. It is noted that the State party has not made the declaration provided for in article 14 of the Convention; some members of the Committee have requested that the State party consider the possibility of making such a declaration.

15. The Committee recommends that the State party ratify the amendments to article 8, paragraph 6, of the Convention, adopted at the fourteenth meeting of States parties.

16. The Committee recommends that the State party's next periodic report be more complete and that it address all the points raised by the Committee.